

Plain Talk Principle ~ Active Voice

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Audience: Continued education class for Attorneys

How to Change Passive Voice to Active:

- Make sure the subject of the sentence is doing the action. To do this:
 - ✓ Find the action verb.
 - ✓ Figure out who is doing the action.
 - ✓ Put the subject (actor) at the beginning of the sentence.
 - ✓ Follow that with the action verb.

Example: “An enforcement action was taken by the State.”

The action is taking an enforcement action. The State is doing the action (enforcing). Put the actor at the beginning and follow that with the action verb and you get “The State took enforcement action.”

Examples:

Passive: “The motion was denied by the trial judge.”

When changed to the active voice, this becomes:

“The trial judge denied the motion.” (Sounds more demonstrative, doesn’t it?)

Passive: “The conservative approach suggests that in *Case X*, the testimony should not have been admitted by the trial court.”

When changed to the active voice, this becomes:

“The conservative approach suggests that in *Case X*, the trial court should not have admitted the testimony.”

Tip: If you can’t figure out who is doing the action in a sentence or clause, chances are the problem is passive voice – people tend to leave out the actor when they use passive voice. (I.e. “the actor is often left out when passive voice is used.”)